

# English Heritage Battlefield Report: Nantwich 1644

**Nantwich (25 January 1644)**

**Parishes:** Henhull; Acton; Nantwich; Hurleston, Worleston

**District:** Crewe and Nantwich

**County:** Cheshire

**Grid Ref:** SJ 632531 (centred on Acton Church)

## Historical Context

The defeat of the Northern Royalists at Winceby and the raising of the siege of Hull in October 1643 made it unlikely that the Marquis of Newcastle would be able to intervene in the war further south, as the Royalist High Command in Oxford had hoped. In compensation, the Royalist strategists set about raising a second army in the North of England. During September 1643 the Marquis of Ormonde, the English Lieutenant-General in Ireland, had negotiated a cessation of hostilities with the Roman Catholic Confederacy which controlled most of the country. The Cessation freed troops to return to England and in October five regiments sailed to Chester to provide the bulk of a new Royalist army, 5,000 strong, under the command of Lord John Byron.

With the help of these troops, Byron got the better of the local Parliamentarian forces under Sir William Brereton. The Royalists eventually controlled all Cheshire, except for the town of Nantwich, a siege of which began on 13 December 1643. On 18 January Byron's attempt to storm the town was repulsed. The Royalists suffered 400 casualties, a severe loss for an army that had experienced steady wastage since the beginning of its Cheshire campaign. Byron by now possibly had only 2,500 infantry and 1,000 cavalry left.

Parliament was anxious to save Nantwich but had no troops readily available. Recourse was therefore made to the services of Sir Thomas Fairfax's army in Lincolnshire. On 29 December, accompanied by a force of 1800 horse and 500 dragoons, Fairfax proceeded via Derbyshire and Staffordshire to Manchester. Here he gathered together 2,500-3,000 infantry from Cheshire and Lancashire. On 21 January, his force augmented, Fairfax left for Nantwich.

Lord Byron, who because of the antipathy of the local population had difficulty securing information, first heard of Fairfax's approach on 24 January. Fairfax was marching along the Chester road and so Byron, in response, switched part of the forces besieging the eastern side of Nantwich to the high ground around the village of Acton a mile west of the town. Subsequently, however, a sudden thaw filled the River Weaver, which flows through the western side of Nantwich, so full of melted snow that it burst its banks, sweeping away overnight the temporary bridge used by Byron to maintain communications between his forces besieging the town. A large part of Byron's army was caught on the wrong side of the river and it was only by making a six mile detour to cross by another bridge that it was able to arrive in time to fight the next day. If, as seems likely, Byron had nurtured hopes of blocking Fairfax's progress at Barbridge, three and a half miles northwest of Nantwich, these had by now been completely dashed. The 200 troops already in position at Barbridge were brushed aside by the Parliamentarians during the morning of 25 January. Soon after, Fairfax and his men reached the top of the modest slope above Hurleston and caught their first sight of the main force of the enemy, drawn up nearly a mile away in front of Acton Church.

## Description of the Battlefield

Nantwich battlefield, which lies to the west of the town, is without dominating features. The ground rises little more than 75 feet in the course of the mile that separates the River Weaver, in the east, from the elevated

ground at Acton, at just over 200 feet, to the west. To the north of Acton the ground falls away some 30-35 feet towards the crossroads of the A51(T) and A534 at Burford but returns to its original height nearer Hurleston. It was across this shallow dip in the landscape that the Royalist and Parliamentary armies first viewed one another.

The Shropshire Union canal, which runs across the battlefield from the north-west to the south-east, lies 175 feet above sea-level. Only in the south-east, as the land continues to slope away towards the River Weaver, does it require an embankment. Land use is agricultural. The fields are mostly given over to pasture.

### Landscape Evolution

The various contemporary accounts of the battle show that the action took place in a relatively flat pastoral landscape of hedgerows and lanes. Some of the hedgerows present today were probably present in the landscape at the time of the battle.

Just outside of the southern boundary of the battlefield area is Dorfold Hall, one of the Royalist camps. Records suggest that the Hall was connected to a deer park which probably extended north into the battlefield area just as, in the later 18th century, parkland was to do. There was a substantial settlement at Acton with its church and moat but the old village of Henhull was by that time deserted. Earthworks and some ridge and furrow in the large field between Henhull Hall Farm and Acton indicate its general location. There is a noticeable hollow way which could indicate a lane from the Farm (and village?) to Acton church.

The road to Nantwich from Chester (now the A51), along which Fairfax advanced, is marked on the earliest maps of Cheshire that feature major highways. It is, for example, clearly shown on Moll's map of 1724<sup>1</sup>, curving north at Acton, just as it does today. The remainder of the existing road system was in place by at least c.1840, when the 1 inch Ordnance Survey map of the area first appeared.

In the late 18th century the Shropshire Union Canal was built through the middle of the battlefield area causing a major change to the landscape pattern. In the same period a lesser impact was caused by the creation of new parkland around Dorfold Hall which extended into the southern part of the battlefield area. Map evidence suggests that the landscape became more enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries building on the earlier hedgerow and enclosure pattern. In recent years a number of these hedgerows have been removed.

Nantwich has, over the years, continued to grow on the west bank of the Weaver (as it has in other directions), but almost all the development has occurred to the south of the Welsh Row (the road to Chester), so the battlefield remains largely unaffected. In Acton, the most significant expansion has taken place to the east of the Chester Road, opposite the church. The housing on Wilbraham Road is all relatively recent and since the Ordnance Survey map was last updated (in 1986) more houses have been added to the estate.

### The Sources

There are some useful sources for the Battle of Nantwich. Amongst them are reports written by the opposing commanders, Fairfax and Byron.

Sir Thomas Fairfax in fact wrote two accounts of the battle, the first in a despatch to the Earl of Essex, dated 29 January 1644<sup>2</sup>, and the second in his *A Short Memorial of Northern Actions*, written some years after<sup>3</sup>. His report to Essex mentions the skirmish at Barbridge, which lasted half an hour. Then:

Having advanced two miles further, we found a good body of them [*the enemy*] planted about Acton Church, a mile from Nantwich: we drew up within cannon shot, which sometimes played upon us, but without hurt, God be thanked. We then understood, that the Lord Byron, who

had besieged the town on both sides of the river, was prevented, by overflowing of the water, from joining with that part at Acton Church; but heard he was taking a compass to get over the river, to join with it. We resolved to fall upon that party at the church, before he should get up to it; but staying to bring up our rear and carriages, we gave him time to obtain that he fought for. Then we resolved to make way with pioneers through the hedges, and so to march to the town, to relieve it; and by it to add some more force to ourselves, to enable us better to fight with them: but being a little advanced in our march, they told me the enemy was close upon the rear. So having about two regiments, being Colonel Holland's and Colonel Booth's, I marched not far before we came to be engaged with the greatest part of their army. The other part presently after assaulted our front: there Sir William Brereton and Colonel Ashton did very good service; and so did Colonel Lambert and Major Copley, with the Horse. They were once in great danger, but that they being next to the town, were assisted by forces which came to their succour in due time. We in the other wing were in as great distress, but that the Horse commanded by Sir William Fairfax did expose themselves to great danger, to encourage the Foot, though capable of little service in those narrow lanes: yet it pleased God, after two hours of hot fighting, they were forced by both wings to retreat to the church; where they were caught, as in a trap.

According to this account the Parliamentarian commanders, understanding that Byron's army was divided, intended attacking the Royalists at Acton Church. The delays attendant on waiting for the rear of their army to come up, however, meant that the opportunity was lost: Byron's forces were able to unite ('we gave him time to obtain that he fought for'). Instead, the Parliamentarians decided to march on Nantwich, join with its garrison, and then fight. They left the road leading to Acton and headed across country, their pioneers cutting a path through the hedgerows. Before Fairfax's army had gone far, he heard that the 'enemy was close upon the rear'. Turning two of his regiments about, Fairfax met this threat; soon after his van was also engaged. During two hours of fighting both his front and rear (now described as 'wings') were in danger, but, with the help of troops sallying out of Nantwich and Sir William Fairfax's cavalry, the troops on each flank triumphed, driving the enemy back to Acton Church.

Paradoxically, Fairfax's *Memorial*, whilst providing additional detail, manages to introduce an element of obscurity. After the skirmish at Barbridge:

We marched on till we were within cannon shot of their works, where half of their army was drawn up.

The river which runs through the town [Nantwich], being raised with the melting of the snow, hindered (as we were informed) those that lay on the other side of the town, from joining with them. We called a Council, wherein it was debated whether we should attempt those in their works (being divided from the rest of their army) or march into the town, and relieve them, and by the increase of more force, be better able, the next day, to encounter them. The latter was resolved on.

So, making way with pioneers, through the hedges, we marched to the town. But after we had gone a little way, word came that the enemy was in the rear. So, facing about two regiments, and my own Regiment of Horse, commanded by Major Rousby, we relieved those that were already engaged, and so the fight began on all sides. Those that fell on our rear, were those that laid on the other side of the town, which had passed the river. Those that were drawn up under their works fell upon our van, which was marching to the town. Thus was the battle divided, there being a quarter of a mile between us in the division that first engaged. Our Foot in the beginning, gave a little ground, but our Horse recovered this by beating the enemy's Horse out of the lanes that flanked the Foot, which did so encourage our men, that they gained now of the enemy, that made them retire from hedge to hedge, till at length they were forced to flee to their works. But their Horse retreated in better order toward Chester, without much loss. Our other wing being assisted from the town (who sallied out with 7 or 800 musketeers) beat the

enemy all back into the same works, which we presently surrounded; but being in great disorder and confusion, some yielded themselves prisoners, with all their chief officers, arms, colours and ammunition.

In this version Sir Thomas Fairfax's Council of War debates whether they should attack the enemy at Acton Church while Byron's force is divided. But the decision to march instead towards Nantwich is not clearly related to the fact that the Royalists had united in the interim. Then, once the Parliamentarians had begun their flank march, the enemy forces that had crossed from the other side of the Weaver attack their rear. This is ambiguous. It is not made plain whether they attacked after joining with the troops at Acton Church, or if they had just arrived on the scene. The troops, originally 'drawn up under their works' (i.e. at Acton, behind the Nantwich siegeworks) meanwhile attack Sir Thomas Fairfax's van. The ensuing battle resolves itself as before.

Whilst not actually contradictory, Fairfax's two accounts of the Battle of Nantwich lend themselves to different interpretations, as will later become clear.

Lord Byron reported on the battle in a despatch sent from Chester to the Marquis of Ormonde on 30 January<sup>4</sup>. Although he implied criticism of the Marquis of Newcastle for not preventing Fairfax's march from Lincolnshire, Byron had been ready to face an opponent who was rightly believed to be superior in numbers.

It fell out unfortunately that the night before we fought with them a small river that ran betwixt our quarters, swelled so upon the falling of rain and melting of the snow that one part of the army was forced to march six miles before it could join with the other: before which time the enemy had gained a pass upon us where we thought to have stopped him [at Barbridge?]. Nevertheless Col. Gibson, who had the ordering of the field as Major-General, in regard of Sir Mich. Erneley's infirmity, was confident we had advantage enough over them, and Col. Moncke, being at the same time come from P. Rupert with a commission to raise a regiment, added great alacrity to the soldiers especially Col. Warren's, where he marched as volunteer. The place of the battle was in an inclosed country, where horse could do little service, and not above a mile from Nantwich: which I forewarned the Major-General of, and desired especial care might be taken lest we should receive prejudice by any sally out of the town: which he assured me he had done. His own regiment had the right wing; my brother's the left; Warren's and Sir Mich. Erneley's the battle; Huncks's regiment was to wait upon them that should attempt to sally out of the town.

At the first encounter we had much the better of them, both our wings clearly beating both theirs, and were possessed of many of their colours: and had given them a total defeat, had not Col. Warren's men and Sir Mich. Erneley's at the same time (notwithstanding all the endeavours of their officers) retreated, without almost fighting a stroke; so that the enemies battle fell into the flanks of both our wings: and at the same time the enemy sallied out of the town with at least 600 men, and possessed themselves of a churchyard where all our carriages stood. Most of the officers retreated into the church; where they were all taken prisoners; only my brother's regiment had the good fortune to bring off their colours with little loss; only Sir Francis Butler was unfortunately taken by a mistake of the enemies colours for his own. The ground was so inclosed that the horse could do no service; and some of them who were struck with a panic fear, so disordered the rest, that though they did not run away, yet it was impossible to make them charge. I stayed above two hours after all the business of the foot was done, to try if anything could be done for the recovery of the cannon and carriages; but all was in vain; so that I was forced to retreat to Chester, with what foot I could gather together of several regiments, which were betwixt 1,000 and 1,200 ...

In this account we hear once again about the Royalists' misfortune with the bridge; Byron helpfully provides us with his order of battle. We then learn that the day was lost because the Royalist centre gave way. Byron

confirms that the garrison of Nantwich played an important part in the enemy's victory and that the Royalist cavalry, hampered by the conditions, were unable to make a useful contribution.

Lord Byron's brother, Robert Byron, gave the Marquis of Ormonde his view of the battle in a letter dated 31 January<sup>5</sup>.

On Thursday last Sir Tho. Fairfax, who was come to their relief with six regiments of foot, and some 1200 horse, advanced where we had taken our ground. To oppose him our army was drawn in several enclosures, where our horse (which we were superior in) could do no good, nor we help one another, by reason of the great distance from one another: yet Gibson's regiment and mine held them very good play and lost nothing by them. Warren's regiment, tho' they had their beloved Colonel Moncke in the head of them, was no sooner charged but they broke, and being rallied again, the next charge ran quite away. Some say, they played foul play, and ran over to the enemy, at the least 60 of them, and fired upon us. By this time they in the town had got 1,000 musketeers ready to sally out upon us. There was a bridge betwixt us and them, which they must pass. There instead of 400 men my brother appointed to make that pass good. Col. Gibson had appointed but 100, who were quickly beaten off and left the passage. Being over, the next regiment was Sir Mich. Erneley's, who stood not long to dispute with them; but broke and ran. All this while Gibson's regiment and mine held entire; till being overcharged on all sides with horse and foot, were forced every man to shift for himself as well as he could. It was now high time for my men to think of a retreat: which they did against two regiments of the enemy that pursued them; they keeping them off still with giving fire in the rear, till they recovered the horse which secured them.

Robert Byron implies that the front of the Royalist army was not continuous: the enclosures broke up the army's cohesion; the separate units were a 'great distance from one another'. While his own regiment and that of Colonel Gibson held firm, Warren's regiment cracked - in spite of Colonel George Monk's efforts. The breach in the line widened when the Nantwich garrison crossed an inadequately guarded bridge and joined the battle. Byron's regiment made a fighting retreat until the Royalist cavalry could afford it some protection.

The remaining two sources for the Battle of Nantwich can be dealt with briefly. Captain John Hodgson joined Sir Thomas Fairfax's army at Manchester. He had served with Fairfax previously at Adwalton Moor. As far as it goes, Hodgson's recollection of the Battle of Nantwich, set down in 1683, echoes that of his general:

We marched on to the enemy's main body, near Acton Church; and there we went to prayers: and, after a council of war, it was resolved to march the whole army to Nantwich, fearing we wanted foot; and, as we were slowly moving after the pioneers with the guns and waggons, the enemy fell upon our right flank with all the power they could: and much ado we had to get our party into order; yet at last it was done, though through many difficulties and great hazards. It pleased God we kept our ground; and one, Captain Holt, with four or five companies of Ashton's regiment, falls upon our enemy's flank in the hedges, and so we put the English-Irish to retreat on their waggons and guns at the church, and there we seized on all, and set a guard about the prisoners<sup>6</sup>.

Thomas Malbon was a resident of Nantwich. A supporter of Parliament, his history of the Civil War, written c.1651, includes this reference to the Battle of Nantwich:

Upon Thursday the 25th of January 1643 [-4], drawing to Hurleston, (two miles from the town) they were aware of the whole body of the King's army at Acton advancing towards them. There the battle began, between them, very fiercely; (about half an hour past three in the afternoon), equal on both sides; but before five o'clock, many of the soldiers of the trained bands issued forth of [the] town, and falling upon the rear of the King's party, they all fled and were utterly

routed...<sup>7</sup>

## The Battle

While the close countryside and the fragmented nature of the battle made it difficult for any one person to achieve an overview, the different accounts of the battle, in the main, agree quite well. The one difficulty arises with Sir Thomas Fairfax's description of events. In his *Memorial* Fairfax states that the Royalist troops which had been on the other side of the River Weaver attacked his rear. Some historians have taken this to mean that the missing portion of the Royalist army acted independently during the battle, approaching Fairfax from behind and attacking as soon as it arrived on the scene<sup>8</sup>. In their book *The Great Civil War 1642-1646* (London 1959) Colonels A H Burne and Peter Young elaborated on the theory<sup>9</sup>. Lord Byron, discovering himself cut off, hurried north to cross to the west bank of the Weaver by the bridge at Church Minshull, six miles downstream from Nantwich. He then returned southwards and by 2 pm on 25 January was approaching the rear of Fairfax's column at Hurleston. According to Burne and Young, Fairfax decided to attack the isolated Royalist force at Acton, while detailing two regiments to fend off Byron, which they had no difficulty in doing. The battle was subsequently won, on the sloping ground to the north of Acton, in the fashion that we have previously heard described.

Burne and Young's reconstruction of the Battle of Nantwich, coming, as it did, from two authorities whose standing ensured that it would achieve wide circulation, provoked a riposte from R N Dore and John Lowe, writing in the *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* two years later<sup>10</sup>. In a closely argued article they challenged many of Burne and Young's conclusions. First, they contended that Byron's troops cut off on the east bank of the Weaver could not have used the bridge at Church Minshull to get across the river. Church Minshull was too far away: it would have entailed a detour of 10-12 miles and Lord Byron wrote that his men marched only six miles. Dore and Lowe, having consulted a list of local bridges dated 1621, believed instead that the stranded Royalists crossed the Weaver a mile to the south of Nantwich at Shrewbridge. Following that route, the journey to Acton from the Royalist encampment at Beamheath (after passing around the eastern side of Nantwich) was four miles, but Dore and Lowe surmised that flooded fields and the vagaries of country lanes could well have added another two miles to the march.

This brings Dore and Lowe to their second point. They claim that Burne and Young were wrong to believe the Royalist army was still divided when the battle began. On the contrary, the two maintain, Sir Thomas Fairfax makes it clear in his dispatch to Lord Essex that the Parliamentarians missed their opportunity to defeat the enemy in detail: 'We resolved to fall upon that party at the church, before he [Byron] should get up to it; but staying to bring up our rear and carriages, we gave him time to obtain that he fought for'. There was certainly no second body of Royalists arriving belatedly at the battlefield, either from Church Minshull or anywhere else.

It would have been helpful if Dore and Lowe had drawn a distinction between what Fairfax wrote in the immediate aftermath of battle to Lord Essex, and what he wrote in his memoirs many years after. The impression given today, reading the two versions together, is that Fairfax, without altering the story, streamlined his later account of the battle. He mentions in his memoirs that the enemy were divided and that a council of war debated whether to take advantage of the fact and attack Acton; but he now omits to mention that the decision taken to march on Nantwich was prompted by the junction of the enemy in the interim.

Dore and Lowe do, however, point out that Fairfax's identification in his memoirs of the enemy who attacked the rear of his column (as it marched towards Nantwich) as being those troops who had crossed the river, need mean nothing more than that they had previously taken up a position on the left of the Royalist line of battle.

In directing his men towards Nantwich, Sir Thomas Fairfax conducted what amounted to a flank march across the face of the enemy. He did not, as Burne and Young imagined, initiate the battle by attacking the Royalists at Acton. Fairfax began his march from a position south of Hurleston and headed in a southeasterly direction. The Royalists, observing Fairfax's manoeuvre, decided to attack, but to get in a position to do so they had to

wheel their line nearly 45 degrees. Dore and Lowe explain what happened next: 'As he advanced, it was reported to Fairfax that the enemy were approaching his rear. This is precisely the impression that his rearguard would have received on getting its first glimpse of the royalist left flank completing its right wheel manoeuvre'. Shortly afterwards, Fairfax's van was also attacked, presumably by the Royalist right wing interposing itself between the Parliamentarians and Nantwich. The Parliamentary column turned to face its attackers: as a consequence Fairfax soon stops referring to his *rear* and *front* and describes instead the operations of his *wings*. Captain Hodgson, from the outset, talks of an enemy attack not upon the rear but the *right flank*. The use of such phraseology undermines further the theory that a separate body of Royalists appeared from the north and operated (however ineffectively) in the Parliamentary rear throughout.

When the two sides came to grips there was no unbroken front. The enclosed ground and impromptu fashion in which each side entered action ensured as much. This circumstance does not make it any easier to determine exactly where the battle was fought; close scrutiny of the sources is necessary.

We know that the Parliamentarians had advanced two miles from Barbridge when they first saw the enemy at Acton Church. This places them on the crest of the gentle ridge at Hurleston, near the present-day Park Farm. Thomas Malbon, who knew the ground, wrote of the Parliamentarians 'drawing to Hurleston'. They stood within cannon shot of the Royalists at Acton Church as their commanders deliberated what to do next.

Eventually, of course, the Parliamentary generals decided to march on Nantwich. Having left the road, progress across the fields was slow and Fairfax remarks more than once that his men had marched only a short distance before the enemy attacked. If, as seems likely, the Royalists were deployed on the sloping ground to the north of Acton, either side of the Chester road, the rear of the Parliamentary column must have just passed what is today Henhull Bridge when the Royalist left wing began to bear down upon it. This agrees with Lord Byron's description of the battle as taking place 'not above a mile from Nantwich'. Sir Thomas Fairfax wrote that there was a quarter of a mile between the front and rear of his army at the start of the fighting, but since this would constitute a very narrow frontage for 5,000 men it is inevitable that as the column converted itself into a line of battle some shaking out occurred. In particular, the successful operations of Colonel John Lambert's cavalry on the left flank and Sir William Fairfax's horsemen on the right would require greater space. Captain John Hodgson remarked on the 'much ado we had to get our party into order'.

Whereas the Parliamentary army had to create room for itself, the Royalists found themselves overextended. Their left wing had partially enveloped the Parliamentary rear/right flank and, soon after the Royalist right wing engaged the Parliamentary van/left flank (presumably striking the enemy column at an angle to bring its march to a halt). Both Royalist wings were therefore pushed forward and outwards and the infantry in the centre had to cover a widening gap. As Robert Byron commented, the Royalist regiments, 'by reason of the great distance from one another', failed to provide mutual support. Although Sir Thomas Fairfax confined himself to describing victory on the flanks, it is clear from the accounts of the Byron brothers that the most significant Parliamentary breakthrough occurred in the centre. The regiments positioned here - Warren and Ernle's - both gave way, allowing the Parliamentarians to enter the breach and swing outwards. Gibson's regiment on the Royalist right and Byron's on the left were each taken in flank, causing the collapse of the entire Royalist line. Byron's regiment, on the western side of the battlefield, succeeded in extricating itself with the support of the Royalist cavalry. The remainder of the army, however, was driven back on Acton Church.

The Royalist discomfiture was increased by a sortie of 600-1,000 men of the Nantwich garrison who, pushing aside the soldiers of Hunckes' regiment who were intended to contain them, helped scatter Ernle's regiment before capturing the Royalist baggage train in Acton churchyard. Robert Byron wrote that to make its intervention the garrison had to cross a bridge 'betwixt us and them' guarded by Hunckes' men. But this particular bridge could not have spanned the River Weaver, as Burne and Young believed, because Nantwich extended to the west bank and Welsh Row, the main street on that side of the river, was within the civil war defences. Dore and Lowe speculate that the 'bridge' may instead have crossed a stream running between the Welsh Row and Dorfold Hall (occupied by the Royalists during the siege) which was filled in during the

nineteenth century. Alternatively, they consider, the bridge, mentioned by no other source, may have been a figment of Robert Byron's imagination.

The Battle of Nantwich proved a substantial victory for Parliament. Two hundred Royalists had been killed and 1500 captured. Numbered amongst the prisoners were the majority of their senior officers, including the turncoat Colonel Monk, architect of the Restoration in 1660. The Royalists lost all their artillery and their baggage train.

### **Indication of Importance**

The relief of Nantwich stabilised the parliamentary cause in Cheshire and ended the prospect of Lord Byron being able to carry the war into enemy-dominated Lancashire. At the same time the victory added considerably to Sir Thomas Fairfax's reputation. His willingness to march across the middle of England in the dead of winter from one theatre of war to another commended itself to Parliament. When a commander-in-chief was sought for the New Model Army a year later, Fairfax was an obvious choice.

While the documentation for the Battle of Nantwich is good, differing conclusions have been reached from the evidence. The rival theories of Burne and Young and Dore and Lowe have been examined above. Fortunately, as often proves the case, disagreement is the catalyst for good research, and the persuasive reconstruction of the Battle of Nantwich by Dore and Lowe has gone on to establish itself, filtering through to a popular work like Martyn Bennett's *Traveller's Guide to the Battlefields of the English Civil War* (Exeter 1990).

### **Battlefield Area**

The battlefield area boundary defines the outer reasonable limit of the battle, taking into account the positions of the combatants at the outset of fighting and the focal area of the battle itself. It does not include areas over which fighting took place subsequent to the main battle. Wherever possible, the boundary has been drawn so that it is easily appreciated on the ground.

The battlefield area at Nantwich is intended to take account of the ground over which fighting occurred rather than preliminary dispositions and the manoeuvres that followed. Accordingly, while the area includes Acton Church, onto which the Royalists were forced back and where their final surrender took place, the battlefield boundary cuts across what was the Royalists' initial position as it heads north from Acton towards the crossroads at Burford. From the vicinity of Burford the battlefield boundary then turns north-eastwards and includes a few fields north of Henhull Bridge before joining the A51(T). The ground around what is now a major crossing-point over the Shropshire Union canal probably witnessed the clash of Sir William Fairfax's horsemen with the Royalist cavalry, in which the Parliamentarians succeeded in beating their opponents 'out of the lanes that flanked the Foot'.

By continuing eastwards along the A51(T) to the crossroads at Holly Farm, the battlefield boundary incorporates the ground upon which the Parliamentarians improvised their line of battle. This assumes that the Parliamentarians, in following a direct path from Hurleston to the Welsh Row quarter of Nantwich, were brought to a halt just short of Welshman's Green. Risking erring on the side of caution, it is possible to draw the battlefield boundary southwards from the A51(T) down Welshmen's Lane.

The southern edge of the battlefield area is drawn from the Welsh Row along the Chester Road back to Acton. Sufficient room is left for the Nantwich garrison to sally forth, sweep aside Hunckes' men and attack the main body of the Royalist army in the rear.



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**Notes**

1. See *A Descriptive List of the Printed Maps of Cheshire 1577-1900* by Harold Whitaker. Chetham Society 1942 (106, New Series) p55.
2. Printed in *Tracts relating to the Civil War in Cheshire 1641-1659* ed. by Rev. James Augustus Atkinson. Chetham Society 65 N.S. (Manchester 1909) pp107-109.
3. Printed in *The Journal for the Society of Army Historical Research* V (1926) pp168-9.
4. Printed in *A Collection of Original Letters and Papers found among the Duke of Ormonde's Papers* ed T Carte (2 vols. London 1739) 1 36-40.
5. *Ibid.* pp40-2.
6. *The Autobiography of Captain John Hodgson of Coley Hall near Halifax*, ed. J Horsfall Turner (Brighouse 1882) p26.
7. *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties by Thomas Malbon and Providence Improved by Edward Burghall* ed. J Hall. Chetham Society 19 p113.
8. See, for example, Clements R Markham *A Life of the Great Lord Fairfax* (London 1870) pp130-1.
9. Burne, A H & Young, Peter *The Great Civil War 1642-1646* (London 1959) pp133-8, 143-4.
10. 'The Battle of Nantwich, 25 January 1644' by R N Dore & John Lowe in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Cheshire and Lancashire* 113 (1961) pp98-123. See also R N Dore *The Civil Wars in Cheshire*, Volume 8 of a History of Cheshire, General Editor J J Bagley (Chester 1966) pp35-9.